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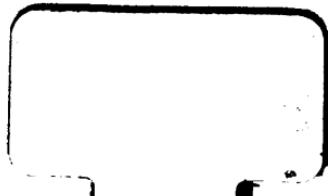
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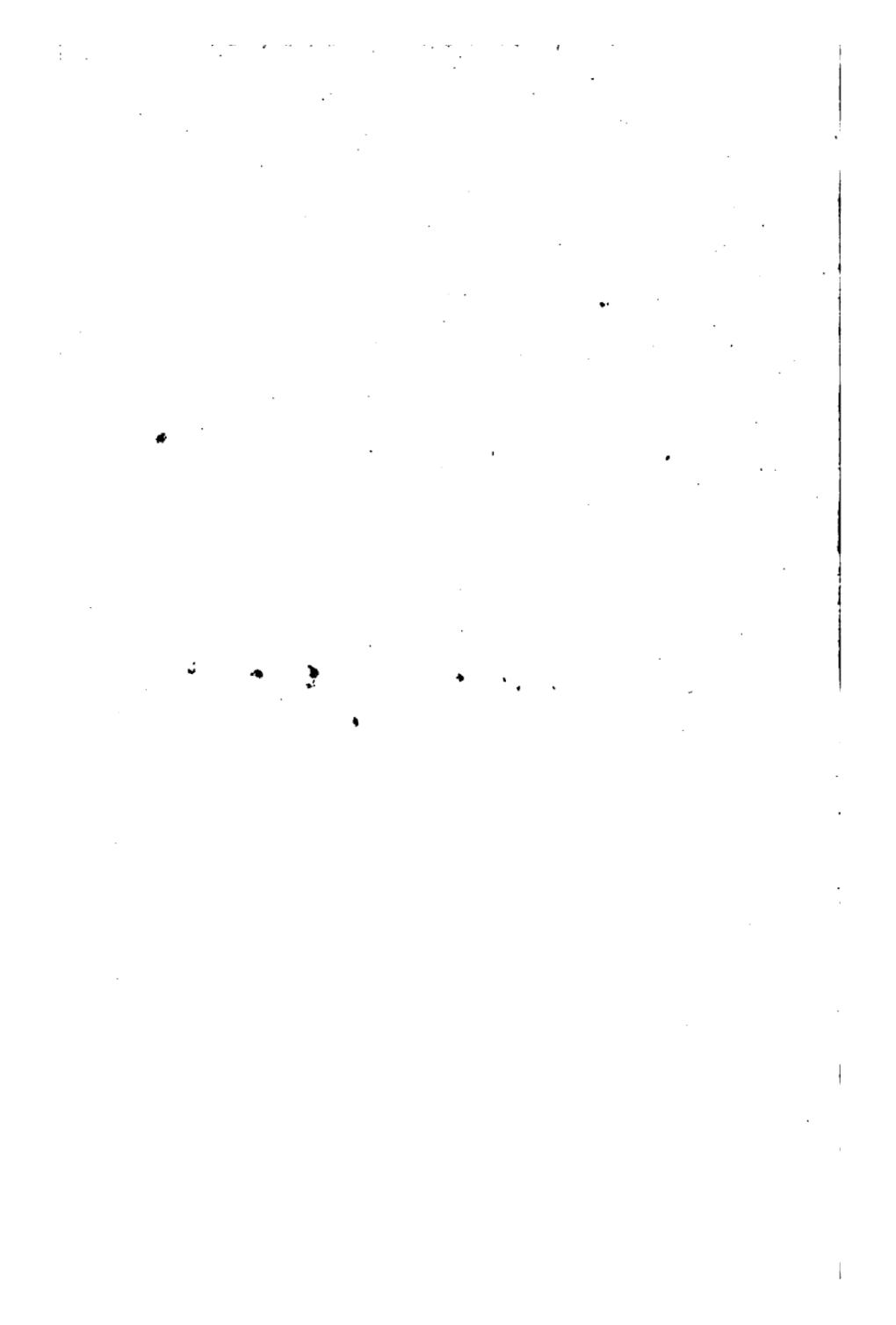
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**ITALIAN RHAPSODY
AND OTHER POEMS OF ITALY**

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Previous Poems
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SAINT-GAUDENS: AN ODE, AND OTHER VERSE. By ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON. Published by the Author, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York: 16mo. Pp. 361. Price \$2.00, postage prepaid. This is the fourth edition of the author's collected poems, and includes the volumes "The Winter Hour" and "Songs of Liberty," now separately out of print.

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ITALIAN RHAPSODY AND OTHER POEMS OF ITALY

BY

ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON

MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
ARTS AND LETTERS

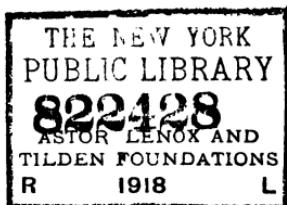
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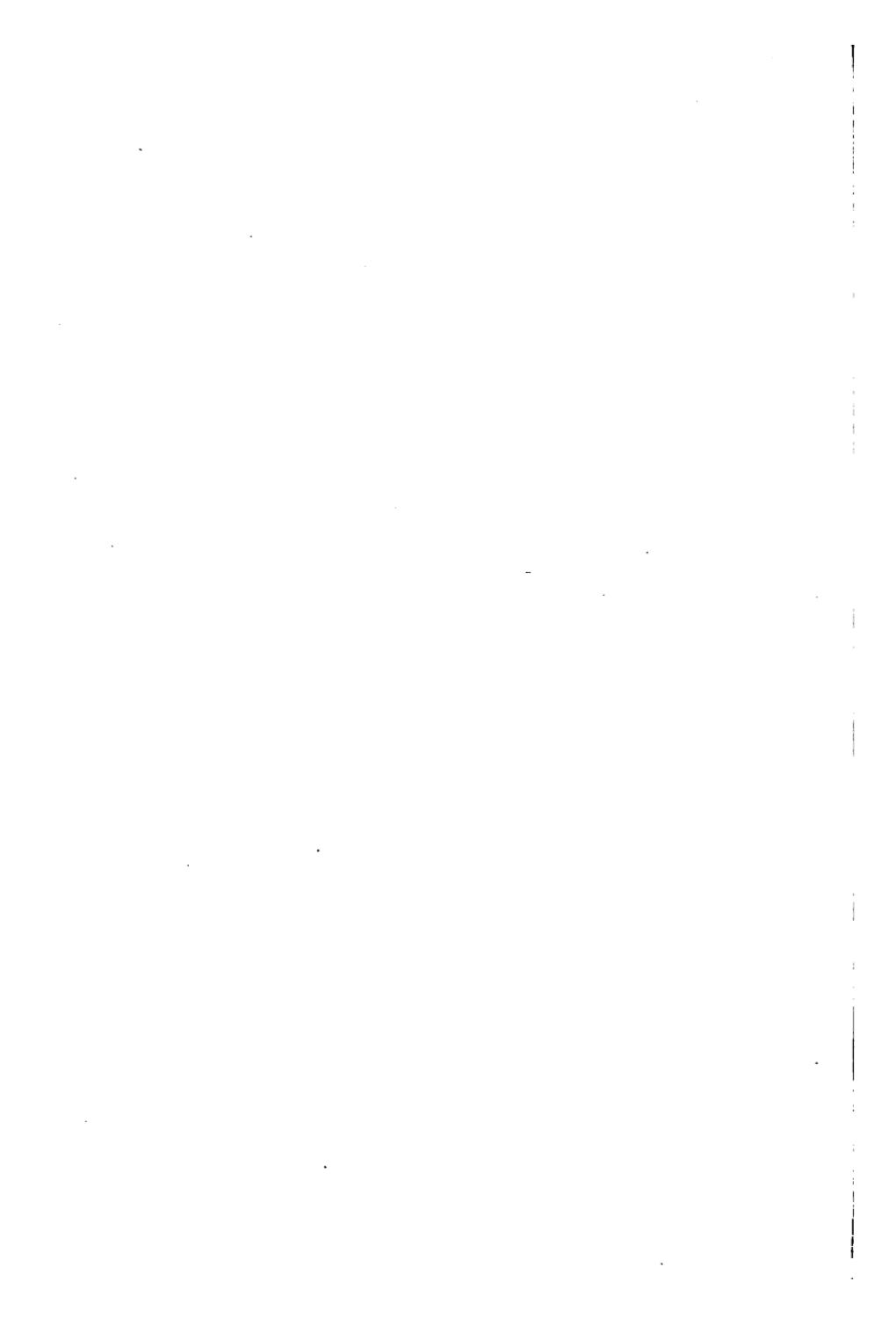
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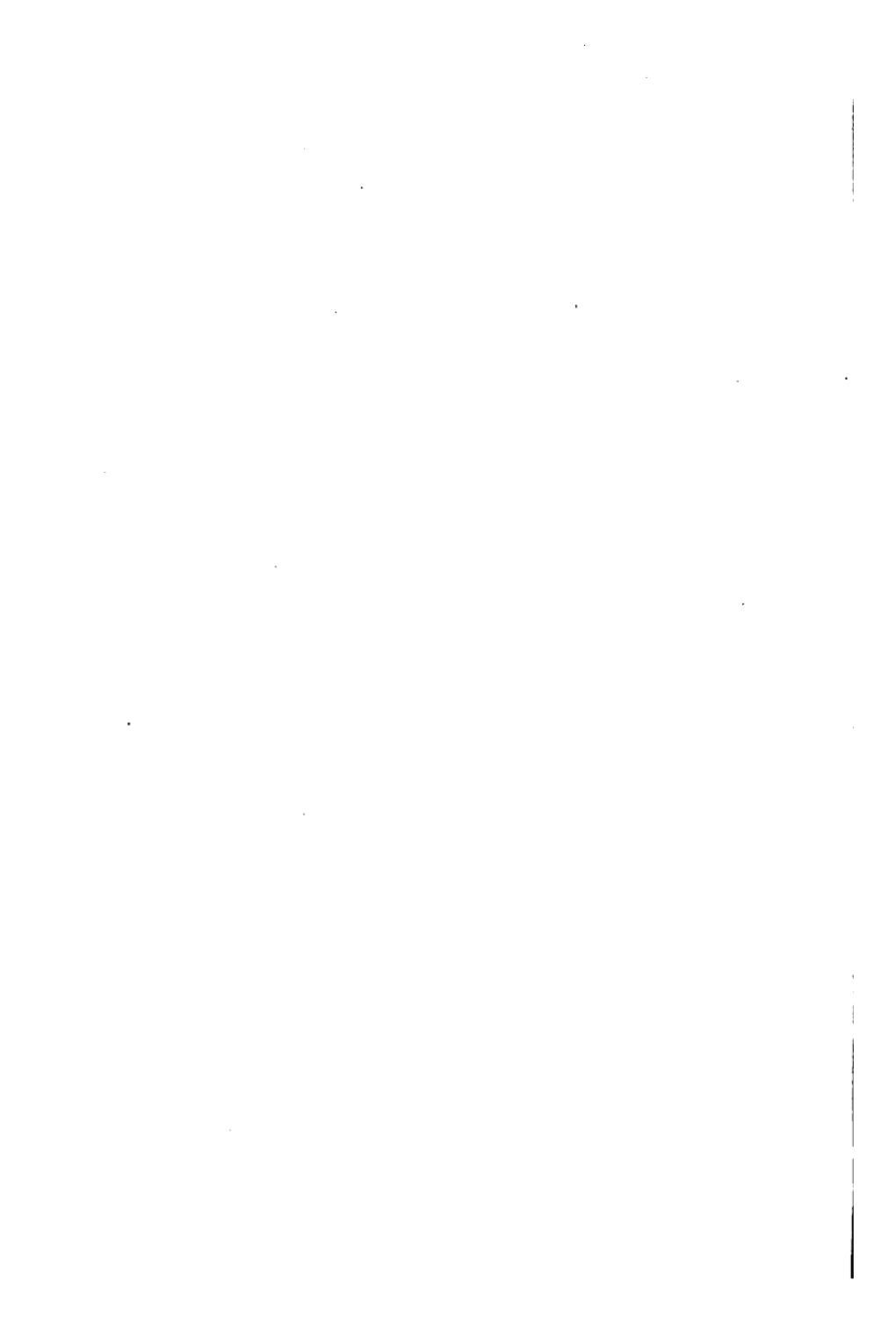
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TO ALL WHO LOVE ITALY



"A CITY WITH A SOUL"

(FLORENCE)

GAY or gloomy with her skies,
Gray Paris like an opal lies
Sparkling on the front of France.
Avignon doth hold a lance
In a tourney-list with Nîmes.
Fair Seville basks in helpless dream
Of conquest, as in caged air
Dreams the tamed lion of his lair.
Regal Genoa still adorns
Her ancient throne; and Pisa mourns.
Now we traverse holy ground
Where three miracles are found:
One of beauty—when with dyes
Of her own sunset Venice vies.
One of beauty and of power—
Rome, the crumbled Babel-tower
Of centuries piled on centuries—
Scant refuge from Oblivion's seas
That swept about her. And the third?—
O heart, fly homeward like a bird,
And look, from Bellosguardo's goal,
Upon a city with a soul!
Who that has climbed that heavenly height
When all the west was gold with light,

"A CITY WITH A SOUL"

And nightingales adown the slope
To listening Love were lending hope,
Till they by vesper bells were drowned,
As though by censers filled with sound—
Who—who would wish a worthier end
To every journey? or not blend
With those who reverently count
This their Transfiguration Mount?

—From "The Winter Hour."

ITALIAN RHAPSODY*

I

DEAR Italy! The sound of thy soft name
Soothes me with balm of Memory and Hope.
Mine, for the moment, height and sweep and slope
That once were mine. Supreme is still the aim
To flee the cold and gray
Of our December day,
And rest where thy clear spirit burns with unconsuming
flame.

II

There are who deem remembered beauty best,
And thine, imagined, fairer is than sight
Of all the charms of other realms confessed,
Thou miracle of sea and land and light.
Was it lest, envying thee,
The world unhappy be,
Benignant Heaven gave to all the all-consoling Night?

* Read before the Mother Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Fraternity, William and Mary College, February 10, 1902.

III

Remembered beauty best? Who reason so?
Not lovers, yearning to the same dumb star
That doth disdain their passion—who, afar,
Seek touch and voice in velvet winds and low.

No, storied Italy,
Not thine that heresy,
Thou who thyself art fairer far than Fancy e'er can
show.

IV

To me thou art an ever-brooding spell;
An old enchantment, exorcised of wrong;
A beacon, whereagainst the wings of Song
Are bruised so, they cannot fly to tell;
A mistress, at whose feet
A myriad singers meet,
To find thy beauty the despair of measures full and
sweet.

V

Of old, ere caste or custom froze the heart,
What tales of thine did Chaucer re-indite,—
Of Constance, and Griselda, and the plight
Of pure Cecilia,—all with joyous art!

Oh, to have journeyed down
To Canterbury town,
And known, from lips that touched thy robe, that triad
of renown!

VI

Fount of Romance whereat our Shakspere drank!
Through him the loves of all are linked to thee
By Romeo's ardor, Juliet's constancy.
He sets the peasant in the royal rank;
Shows under mask and paint
Kinship of knave and saint,
And plays on stolid man with Prospero's wand and
Ariel's prank.

VII

Another English foster-child hadst thou
When Milton from the breast of thy delight
Drew inspiration. With a vestal's vow
He fed the flame caught from thy sacred light.
And when upon him lay
The long eclipse of day,
Thou wert the memory-hoarded treasure of his doomèd
sight.

VIII

Name me a poet who has trod thy soil ;
He is thy lover, ever hastening back,
With thee forgetting weariness and toil,
The nightly sorrow for the daily lack.
How oft our lyric race
Looked last upon thy face !
Oh, would that I were worthy thus to die in thine
embrace !

IX

Oh, to be kin to Keats, but as a part
Of the same Roman earth !—to sleep, unknown,
Not far from Shelley of the virgin heart,
Where not one tomb is envious of a throne ;
Where the proud pyramid,
To brighter glory bid,
Gives Cestius his longed-for fame, marking immortal
Art.

X

Or, in loved Florence, to repose beside
Our trinity of singers ! Fame enough
To neighbor lordly Landor, noble Clough,
And her, our later sibyl, sorrow-eyed.

Oh, tell me—not their arts,
But their Italian hearts
Won for their dust that narrow oval, than the world
more wide!

XI

So might I lie where Browning should have lain,
My "Italy" for all the world to read,
Like his on the palazzo. For thy pain
In losing from thy rosary that bead,
England accords thee room
Around his minster tomb—
A province conquered of thy soul, and not an Arab
slain!

XII

Then take these lines, and add to them the lay,
All inarticulate, I to thee indite:
The sudden longing on the sunniest day,
The happy sighing in the stormiest night,
The tears of love that creep
From eyes unwont to weep,
Full with remembrance, blind with joy, and with
devotion deep.

xiii

Absence from thee is such as men endure
Between the glad betrothal and the bride;
Or like the years that Youth, intense and sure,
From his ambition to his goal must bide.
And if no more I may
Mount to Fiesole . . .
Oh, then were Memory meant for those to whom is
Hope denied.

xiv

Show me a lover who hath drunk by night
Thy beauty-potion, as the grape the dew:
'T were little wonder he were poet too,
With wine of song in unexpected might,
While moonlit cloister calls
With plashy fountain-falls,
Or darkened Arno moves to music with its mirrored
light.

xv

Who can withstand thee? What distress or care
But yields to Naples, or that long day-dream
We know as Venice, where alone more fair
Noon is than night; where every lapping stream

Wooes with a soft caress
Our new-world weariness,
And every ripple smiles with joy at sight of scene so
rare.

XVI

The mystery of thy charm—ah, who hath guessed?
'T was ne'er divined by day or shown in sleep;
Yet sometimes Music, floating from her steep,
Holds to our lips a chalice brimmed and blest:
Then know we that thou art
Of the Ideal part—
Of Man's one thirst that is not quenched, drink he
howe'er so deep.

XVII

Thou human-hearted land, whose revels hold
Man in communion with the antique days,
And summon him from prosy greed to ways
Where Youth is beckoning to the Age of Gold;
How thou dost hold him near
And whisper in his ear
Of the lost Paradise that lies beyond the alluring haze!

XVIII

In tears I tossed my coin from Trevi's edge,—
A coin unsordid as a bond of love,—
And, with the instinct of the homing dove,
I gave to Rome my rendezvous and pledge.
And when imperious Death
Has quenched my flame of breath,
Oh, let me join the faithful shades that throng that
fount above.

LOVE IN ITALY

THEY halted at the terrace wall;
Below, the towered city lay;
The valley in the moonlight's thrall
Was silent in a swoon of May.
As hand to hand spoke one soft word
Beneath the friendly ilex-tree,
They knew not, of the flame that stirred,
What part was Love, what Italy.

They knew what makes the moon more bright
Where Beatrice and Juliet are,—
The sweeter perfume in the night,
The lovelier starlight in the star;
And more that glowing hour did prove,
Beneath the sheltering ilex-tree,—
That Italy transfigures Love,
As Love transfigures Italy.

SALVINI

"DEAD is old Greece," they mourned ere yet arose

This Greek—this oak of old Achaian graft

Seed-sown where westward tempests wept and
laughed,

As now when some great gust of heaven blows
From lair levantine. How the giant grows!—

Not to lone ruin of a withered shaft,

But quaffing life in every leafy draught,—

Fathered by Storm and mothered by Repose.

Nay, doubt the Greeks are gone till, this green
crest

In splendor fallen, round the wrack shall be
Prolonged, like memories of a noble guest,
The phantom glory of the actor's day.

Then, musing on Olympus, men shall say

The myth of Jove took rise from lesser majesty.

THE HOUR OF AWE

Not in the five-domed wonder
Where the soul of Venice lies,
When the sun cleaves the gloom asunder
With pathways to Paradise,
And the organ's melodious thunder
Summons you to the skies ;

Not in that rarest hour,
When over the Arno's rush
The City of Flowers' flower
Looms in the sunset flush,
And the poignant stroke from the tower
Pierces the spirit's hush ;

Not Rome's high vault's devising
That builded the heavens in,
When you know not the anthem's rising
From the song of the cherubin,
Where, sight and soul surprising,
Dusk utters your dearest sin :

THE HOUR OF AWE

Not these—nor the star-sown splendor,
Nor the deep wood's mystery,
Nor the sullen storm's surrender
To the ranks of the leaping sea,
Nor the joy of the springtime tender
On Nature's breast to be;

But to find in a woman's weeping
The look you have longed to find,
And know that in Time's safe-keeping,
Through all the ages blind,
Was Love, like a winged seed, sleeping,
For you and the waiting wind.

TITIAN'S TWO LOVES, IN THE BORGHESE

ONE forgets not the first dead he sorrowed over;
One forgets not the first kiss of the first lover.
Not the dust of ages could remembrance cover
 How in Titian's golden kingdom first I strayed.

Oh, that Roman morning's azure, softly sifting
Through the gray, the while the rapt eye caught the
 rifting
Of the sun's rich fire where molten mists were drifting,
 As one looks upon an opal gently swayed.

Ah! but in the palace there was sun more golden!
Art for once to Nature was no more beholden.
Man to his belovèd had the passion olden
 Sung in color, and his mighty Love grew Fame.

For I guessed, while hotly others were contending
Which was Love Divine, that each to each was lending
Supplemental graces for a perfect blending—
 That to paint one twofold woman was his aim.

16 *TITIAN'S TWO LOVES, IN THE BORGHESE*

One without the other's beauty were but torso:
Human needs divine, ah, yes, and—maybe more so—
By divine is needed. (Singing down the Corso
I, elate, enthralled, went, happy just to be!)

• • • • •
Yet till thee at last I knew—each blended feature
Where the two Loves meet in rightly balanced nature—
Never had I known a tithe of Titian's creature:
God, the master limner, painted both in thee.

BROWNING AT ASOLO

(INSCRIBED TO HIS FRIEND MRS. ARTHUR BRONSON)

THIS is the loggia Browning loved,
High on the flank of the friendly town;
These are the hills that his keen eye roved,
The green like a cataract leaping down
To the plain that his pen gave new renown.

There to the West what a range of blue!—
The very background Titian drew
To his peerless Loves. O tranquil scene!
Who than thy poet fondlier knew
The peaks and the shore and the lore between?

See! yonder's his Venice—the valiant Spire,
Highest one of the perfect three,
Guarding the others: the Palace choir,
The Temple flashing with opal fire—
Bubble and foam of the sunlit sea.

Yesterday he was part of it all—
Sat here, discerning cloud from snow
In the flush of the Alpine afterglow,
Or mused on the vineyard whose wine-stirred row
Meets in a leafy bacchanal.

Listen a moment—how oft did he!—
To the bells from Fontalto's distant tower
Leading the evening in . . . ah, me!
Here breathes the whole soul of Italy
As one rose breathes with the breath of the bower.

Sighs were meant for an hour like this
When joy is keen as a thrust of pain.
Do you wonder the poet's heart should miss
This touch of rapture in Nature's kiss
And dream of Asolo ever again?

"Part of it yesterday," we moan?
Nay, he is part of it now, no fear.
What most we love we are that alone.
His body lies under the Minster stone,
But the love of the warm heart lingers here.

"LA MURA," ASOLO, JUNE 3, 1892.

TO ONE WHO NEVER GOT TO ROME

(EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN)

[ON his long-deferred and only trip to Italy Stedman entered the country from the north for what proved to be a very brief sojourn, for soon after reaching Venice he was suddenly obliged to return to America. It remained his cherished desire to see the Eternal City, and the Roman Committee of the Keats-Shelley Memorial long hoped that he might be present at the proposed dedication of the Keats House, contemplated for the 23d of February, 1908. He died five weeks before that day, when the lines which follow were written. As the active and devoted Chairman of the American Committee he took a leading part in this project. Probably his last words written for publication on a literary topic were in praise of the two poets, to which he added a transcription from "Ariel," his ode on Shelley.]

You who were once bereft of Rome
With but the Apennines between,
And went no more beyond the foam,
But loved your Italy at home
As others loved her seen :

You knew each old imperial shaft
With sculpture laureled to the blue ;
Where martyr bled and tyrant laughed ;
Where Horace his Falernian quaffed,
And where the vintage grew.

The Forum's half-unopened book
You would have pondered well and long;
And loved St. Peter's misty look,
With vesper chantings in some nook
Of far-receding song.

Oft had you caught the silver gleams
Of Roman fountains. To your art
They add no music. Trevi teems
With not more free or bounteous streams
Than did your generous heart.

I hoped that this Muse-hallowed day
Might find your yearning dream come true:
That you might see the moonlight play
On ilex and on palace gray
As 't were alone for you;—

That your white age might disappear
Within the whiteness of the night,
While the late strollers, lending ear
To your young joy, would halt and cheer
At such a happy wight;—

That you,—whose toil was never done,—
Physicianed by the Land of Rest,
Might, like a beggar in the sun,
Watch idly the green lizard run
From out his stony nest;—

That you, from that high parapet
That crowns the graceful Spanish Stairs,
(Whose cadence, as to music set,
Moving like measured minuet,
Would charm your new-world cares),

Might see the shrine you helped to save;
And yonder blest of cypresses,
That proud above your poets wave.
Warder of all our song, you gave
What loyalty to these!

The path to Adonais' bed,
That pilgrims ever smoother wear,
Who could than you more fitly tread?—
Or with more right from Ariel dead
The dark acanthus bear?

22 *TO ONE WHO NEVER GOT TO ROME*

Alas! your footstep could not keep
Your fond hope's rendezvous, brave soul!
Yet, if our last thoughts ere we sleep
Be couriers across the deep
To greet us at the goal,

Who knows but now, aloof from ills,
The heavenly vision that you see—
The towers on the sapphire hills,
The song, the golden light—fulfils
Your dream of Italy!

THE SPANISH STAIRS

[It will be recalled that the house in which Keats died adjoins the Spanish Stairs in Rome. It has been proposed to remove the fountain below them to make room for the tramway in the piazza.]

ROME, symbol of all change, oh, change not here!

Thou, ever avid of beauty, who shall say

Thou hast forsworn it in a vain display

And blare of discord, as though eager ear

Listening for nightingale heard chanticleer?

Oh, leave these sunny stairs, that float and stray

From fountain blithe and flowers' rich array

To beckoning bells and chanting nuns anear.

Of all the dead that loved them, hear that voice

Whose sorrow and last silence once they knew,

Whose spirit guards them with his flaming theme,

The immortal joy of beauty. Oh, rejoice,

And stay thy hand: that future ages, too,

By them may mount to heaven, like Jacob in his
dream.

PIAZZA DI SPAGNA,
St. Agnes' Eve, 1903.

THE NAME WRIT IN WATER

(PIAZZA DI SPAGNA, ROME)

The Spirit of the Fountain speaks:

YONDER 's the window my poet would sit in.
While my song murmured of happier days;
Mine is the water his name has been writ in,
Sure and immortal my share in his praise.

Gone are the pilgrims whose green wreaths here hung
for him,—
Gone from their fellows like bubbles from foam;
Long shall outlive them the songs have been sung for
him;
Mine is eternal—or Rome were not Rome.

Far on the mountain my fountain was fed for him,
Bringing soft sounds that his nature loved best:
Sighing of pines that had fain made a bed for him;
Seafaring rills, on their musical quest;

Bells of the fairies at eve, that I rang for him;
Nightingale's glee, he so well understood;
Chant of the dryads at dawn, that I sang for him;
Swish of the snake at the edge of the wood.

Little he knew 'twixt his dreaming and sleeping,
The while his sick fancy despaired of his fame,
What glory I held in my loverly keeping:
Listen! my waters will whisper his name.

SPRING AT THE VILLA CONTI

Of Time and Nature still the fairest daughter,
Low-voiced Repose! Here thou dost ever dwell,
While Fancy wills no more to wander on.
With how few simples dost thou steep the sense,
Holding in soft suspense,
Like pauses in the tolling of a bell,
The beauty coming and the beauty gone.
Nothing is here but woods and water,
Spaces, and stone, and a sculptor's wit
Simply to fashion it
Into one long line of many niches,
Whose fountains are fed by the rushing riches
That, bowl to bowl, from the woodland pool
Fall in a rhythm clear and strong,
Singing to Nature her eldest song,
Prattling their paradox—restfully restless.
O March, with never a moment zestless,
Nor the sun too warm nor the shade too cool!
O May and the music of birds now nestless!
Come soon and brood o'er the woodland pool!

(For lover or nightingale who can wait?
Whenever he cometh he cometh late.)

The light plays over the ilex green,
Turning to silver the somber sheen,
And Spring in the heart of the day doth dwell
As the thought of a loved one dwells with me,
And only three cypresses to tell
"This is not Heaven, but Italy."

FRASCATI, March, 1903.

COMO IN APRIL

THE wind is Winter, though the sun be Spring:

The icy rills have scarce begun to flow;
The birds unconfidently fly and sing.

As on the land once fell the northern foe,

The hostile mountains from the passes fling
Their vandal blasts upon the lake below.

Not yet the round clouds of the Maytime cling

Above the world's blue wonder's curving show,
And tempt to linger with their lingering.

Yet doth each slope a vernal promise know:

See, mounting yonder, white as angel's wing,
A snow of bloom to meet the bloom of snow.

.
Love, need we more than our imagining

To make the whole year May? What though
The wind be Winter if the heart be Spring?

THE VINES THAT MISSED THE BEES

(TO COUNT COSIMO RUCELLAI OF FLORENCE WITH A
COPY OF HIS ANCESTOR GIOVANNI RUCELLAI'S
POEM "THE BEES")

ONCE, when I saw the tears upon your vines
 You told me they were "weeping"—but for what?
I find their secret in your kinsman's lines:
 They missed the honeyed music he has caught.

FLORENCE, April, 1906.

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THE POET IN THE CHILDREN'S EYES

(TO COUNTESS EDITH RUCELLAI, DESCENDANT OF JOSEPH
RODMAN DRAKE,—IN HER ALBUM, CONTAINING
LINES BY BROWNING, LONGFELLOW,
LOWELL, AND OTHERS)

THOU of a poet's blood, and many a tie
 Of kin or friendship with the singing race:
How shall I dare, without a throb or sigh,
 Near these lost bards beloved my name to place!

One wish I offer, though with halting fingers:
 That in thy brood, of eager eyes divine,
The poet that within the mother lingers
 May find a voice worthy the deathless line.

FLORENCE, April, 1906.

FAREWELL TO ITALY

We lingered at Domo d'Ossola—
Like a last, reluctant guest—
Where the gray-green tide of Italy
Flows up to a snowy crest.

The world from that Alpine shoulder
Yearns toward the Lombard plain—
The hearts that come, with rapture,
The hearts that go, with pain.

Afar were the frets of Milan;
Below, the enchanted lakes;
And—*was* it the mist of the evening,
Or the mist that the memory makes?

We gave to the pale horizon
The Naples that evening gives;
We reckoned where Rome lies buried,
And we felt where Florence lives.

And as Hope bends low at parting
For a death-remembered tone,
We searched the land that Beauty
And Love have made their own.

We would take of her hair some ringlet,
Some keepsake from her breast,
And catch of her plaintive music
The strain that is tenderest.

So we strolled in the yellow gloaming
(Our speech with musing still)
Till the noise of the militant village
Fell faint on Calvary Hill.

And scarcely our mood was broken
Of near-impending loss
To find at the bend of the pathway
A station of the Cross.

And up through the green aisle climbing
(Each shrine like a counted bead),
We heard from above the swaying
And mystical chant of the creed.

Then the dead seemed the only living,
And the real seemed the wraith,

And we yielded ourselves to the vision
We saw with the eye of Faith.

Then she said, "Let us go no farther:
'T is fit that we make farewell
While forest and lake and mountain
Are under the vesper spell."

As we rested, the leafy silence
Broke like a cloud at play,
And a browned and burdened woman
Passed, singing, down the way.

'T was a song of health and labor,—
Of childlike gladness, blent
With the patience of the toiler
That tyrants call content.

"Nay, this is the word we have waited,"
I said, "that a year and a sea
From now, in our doom of exile,
Shall echo of Italy."

Just then what a burst from the bosquet—
As a bird might have found its soul!
And each by the halt of the heart-throb
Knew 't was the rossignol.

Then we drew to each other nearer
And drank at the gray wall's verge
The sad, sweet song of lovers,—
Their passion and their dirge.

And the carol of Toil below us
And the pæan of Prayer above
Were naught to the song of Sorrow,
For under the sorrow was Love.

• • • • •
Alas! for the dear remembrance
We chose for an amulet:
The one that is left to keep it—
Ah! how can he forget?

THE CROWNED REPUBLIC

I

FORGIVE us, Italy, who have loved thee long,
Daughter of Beauty, Cynosure of Song,
That we who knew thee fair should not have known
thee strong.

For Beauty is no weakling, taking odds
From earthly Power and cringing at its nods,
But giver of sovereign laws to immemorial gods.

She is no mere contriver of design,
Of thrilling color or uplifting line;
She sings within the soul a music all divine.

And when she sets the ardent youth afame
With duty, brooking no unworthy aim,
She is but Justice honored by another name.

II

We should have read the roster of thy great
Who from mismated fragments inchoate
The fair mosaic made of thine harmonious state;

Alike in nothing but in love of thee
While thou wert yet a dream of Liberty,
They gave thee all they were and all they hoped
to be:—

He of Savoy, first man and then a king ;
He of Caprera, armed with David's sling ;
He of Turin, who won with wise imagining ;

He of the Tuscan vineyards, firm as steel ;
And he of Genoa, priest of the common weal,
And he whose voice to Venice was a tocsin-peal.

O land for whom thy sons were fain to die
As lovers are to live ! No obloquy
Their secrets could unlock, their purpose turn awry.

In thy deep dungeons Freedom grew to might,
Nourished by darkness as the rose by light.
Would tyrants conquer Thought : they must abolish
Night.

Behind the bars where Settembrini dwelt,
Beside the chains whose scars Poerio felt,
Above the beds bereaved where dauntless women knelt,

Thine image, as in Dante's vision, shone—
The Italy that some day would be one,
When alien yoke was cleft and cruel sands were run.

III

Now, when the old oppressor of thy land
Had weakly chosen by his side to stand
Who holds the torch and bribe in either treacherous
hand,

Thought they to fright thee by war's awful price,
Or silence thee by lure of paradise—
Thee with thy glorious ancestry of sacrifice?

Forgive us, we were over-slow to scan
The incredible cunning of the monstrous plan
Whereby the spider State has set its web for Man;

But fallen are the scales, and now our heart
That with thee stormed the startled Alps, takes part
With glad and welcome aid from mint and mine and
mart.

And, haply, on thy waves our ships may dare
The iron shark within his stealthy lair
Till the freed seas forget what late was their despair.

Oh, fortunate if our torn flag be found
Comrade of thine on some embattled ground
Thenceforth by Garibaldi's memory made renowned.

What name in all thine epic history
But his to summon us and trumpet thee—
Who found his foster land what thou wert born to be!

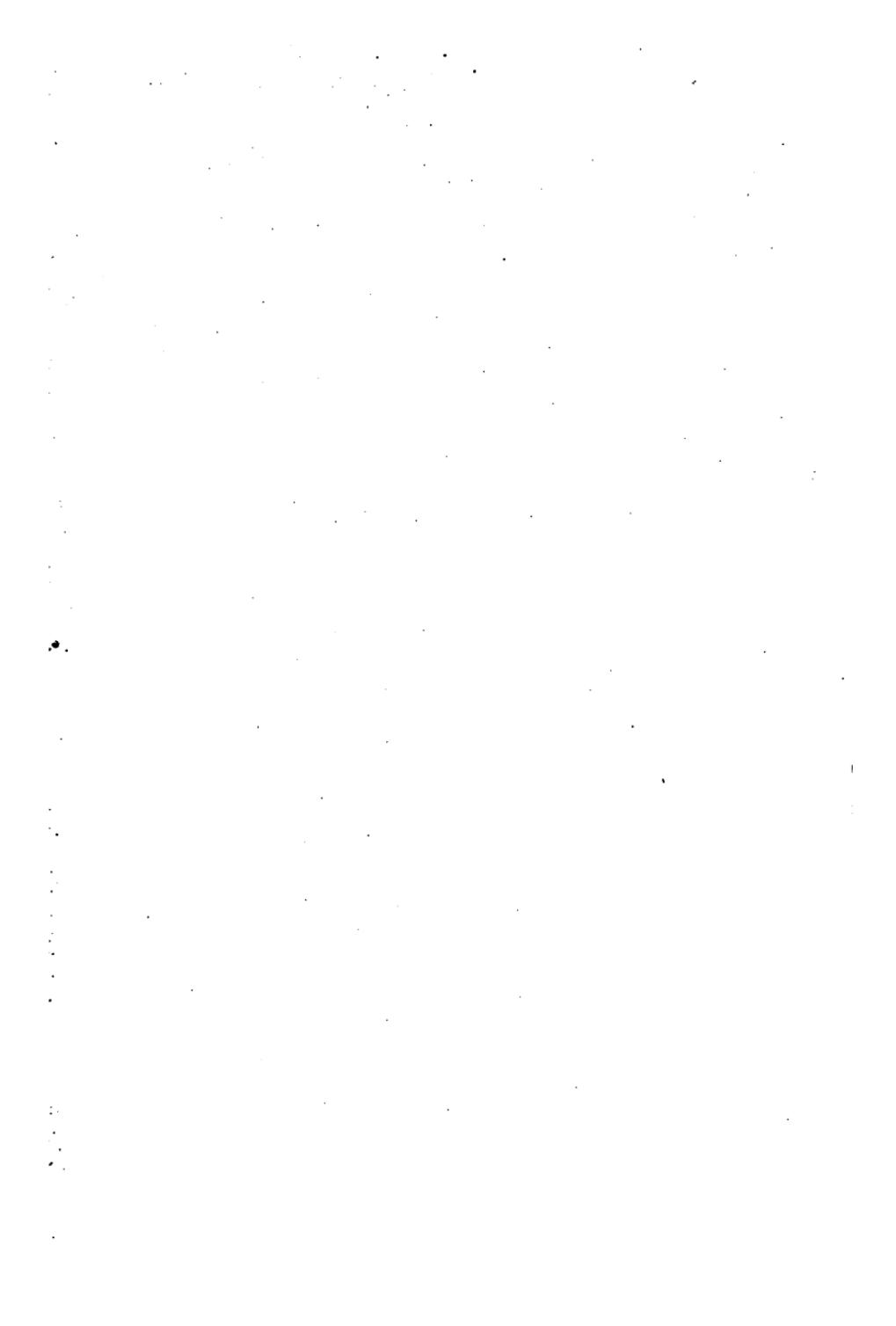
Pillar of cloud and fire, his spirit soar'th
Above thy eager legions pressing forth
And cheers them on to save their brothers of the North.

O Crowned Republic, let us be of those
Who know and conquer all the people's foes—
Without, within—that dare the gates of Freedom
close.

June 8, 1917.







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